

# The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee/Virginia

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**Going Global**  
Three Who Are In To Win

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# The Mexico You May Not Know



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It is probably safe to say that most Tri-Cities businesses and workers accept the reality of a global marketplace. For some, the transition has been painful, while others have actively developed profitable new international business relationships. No communities are isolated from global competition, including the Tri-Cities.

One of the major export markets for our region is Mexico. This may come as a surprise to many. For some Tri-Cities residents, the word "Mexico" brings to mind beautiful beaches but also illegal immigrants, cheap wages and poor educational facilities. Most do not realize that in 2006 Tennessee and Virginia exported almost \$3 billion worth of goods to Mexico.

The Mexico of today is extremely diverse and in many regions extraordinarily progressive. We recently returned from a visit to Monterrey, a thriving high-desert city of four million people. It is a leading manufacturing and business center and also home to the most important private university in Mexico, the Tecnológico de Monterrey. The "Tec," as it is locally known, has one of the most modern campuses in North America. It has been wireless for years and boasts facilities that would be the envy of any college or university in the Tri-Cities.

The Tec will again be the site for our third annual "SW Virginia/NE Tennessee Study in Mexico" program this summer. This nationally recognized short-course program is designed to introduce area college students to Mexican history, culture and business practices. Past trips have included meetings

with local partners of major Tri-Cities businesses, including Strongwell, Inc., Bristol Compressors and Eastman Chemicals. All three companies are important exporters of manufactured products to Mexico.

For many of our past student participants, the trip to Monterrey was their first international study experience. These trips have been a wonderful opportunity for personal growth, expanded educational goals and new career possibilities. The program is all about making sure our students won't be "globalization dinosaurs" in this age of international trade.

Sadly, less than five percent of our area college students participate in any kind of international study program. While there is no question that rigorous math and science programs are needed to prepare our college students for the technology-driven careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we would strongly argue that international studies must have an equal seat at the higher education table. Study abroad experiences can certainly no longer be considered frills; increasingly, they will make the difference between getting the job or not.

What better place to start the international education process than Mexico? Like it or not, our two countries share an important history and will share an important future. A wealth of opportunities is waiting in the Mexico you may not know. **BJ**

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